



95: A Walk to Remember by cali-chan

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His own smile [was] mischievous as he leaned his forearms against the windowsill. "You wanna come for a ride? I want to show you something."

This has nothing whatsoever to do with the movie of the same name. Also, prepare for death by schmoop.

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When Eleven felt herself stir that morning, she wasn't sure why she'd woken so early. Because, certainly, though her eyes remained closed for a moment longer, she knew somehow that it was too early for anyone to be awake. Taking a second to stretch her arms and back against the softness of her bedsheets, she wondered what had woken her up.

And then she heard it.

Tap tap tap.

She finally opened her eyes, gaze landing first straight up at the ceiling. She was in her bedroom at home, and it was, indeed, very early. The light was streaming in through her translucent window shades, but it was dim, like the sun had just come up. Looking around her room, she saw that the door was closed. She thought for a second that someone must've been knocking, and was about to open it with her mind when the sound came again.

Tap tap tap.

It was coming from the window.

She saw the silhouette, details blurred by the drapes, and in any other situation she might've been startled, but she would recognize that shape everywhere. With a smile she sat up in bed, swinging her legs over the side as she used her powers to pull the shades up and

open the window.

"You're not supposed to be here," she told him in a teasing tone, loud enough that her voice would carry all the way to the window, but low enough that she wouldn't attract the attention of anyone else in the house.

"I know," Mike replied, his own smile mischievous as he leaned his forearms against the windowsill, "that's why I'm technically still outside." He had to be crouching, of course, and she wondered if he'd been tapping at her window for a while; that position couldn't be comfortable. "You wanna come for a ride? I want to show you something."

El contemplated the offer for a second. She knew she should say no, but she had missed him. Perhaps if they managed to go and come back before anyone realized she was gone... it was still early; it could work. "Okay, but we can't take too long," she warned.

Her concession was met with a victorious grin. "We'll be back in half an hour," he assured her enthusiastically.

He waited outside while she changed, stepping up to the window again just once, to help her out. Not that she needed the help, let's be real; she'd snuck out through her window dozens of times before, much to her father's chagrin. They had to walk about a block to get to the car, since Mike had parked a ways away so nobody would hear it, but Eleven didn't mind; the temperature was crisp but the sky was clear as they walked hand in hand away from her house.

"So where are we going?" she asked as she made herself comfortable in the passenger seat.

"It's a secret," he replied cheekily, which made her roll her eyes as they pulled away from their parking spot. She didn't ask again, knowing he wouldn't give her an answer, even though he kept looking at her from time to time as if he expected her to. He looked like he did whenever he put some unexpected twist into one of his D&D campaigns that nobody knew about, but he was so eager about it that everybody could tell *something* was coming. El was curious, but she was quite okay with waiting for the surprise.

The drive didn't take long, anyway. Mike parked on the curb on a street right behind the edge of the forest; it was one of those backroads near Mirkwood that people hardly ever used, so he wasn't going to get a ticket or anything. "Come on, we have to walk a bit," he said as he got out of the car, extending a hand to her again.

"What could you possibly have to show me in the middle of the forest, today of all days?" she asked, but let herself be tugged forward nonetheless.

"You'll see," he said, stretching out the mystery for a little longer.

They walked further into the trees for just a minute or two before Mike stopped. "I think this is it," he said, dropping her hand as he looked around.

El looked around as well, not noticing anything in particular that stood out from the vegetation. What exactly did he mean for her to be looking at? "What do you mean, this is it?" she asked, somewhat confused. "What is?"

"This place," Mike repeated. He turned to her, excited. "You were standing... right here..." He pushed her lightly by the shoulders until she was standing in the right place, dry leaves crunching under their feet as they moved. "And I..." He walked a few steps backward. "...was right here," he finished, planting both his feet together in the correct spot. Then he grinned, waiting for her to react.

As she heard him explain, the pieces started falling into place for her. She could see the scene in her head. Her entire body shivering, wet leaves squelching under her bare feet, being forced to squint because someone was flashing a bright light right at her face. She couldn't really see him, any of them, at first, because of the flashlight, but soon enough he lowered it just lightly, and she caught her first glimpse of him, before she even noticed the other two, the details of his face becoming sharper as he took a cautious step toward her despite being warned by his friends in too-loud whispers to be careful...

Her eyes widened as she looked around, her heart doing somersaults inside her chest. "This place is..." her voice trailed off as she gaped at

him.

"...where we first met, yeah," he finished with a nod, beaming at her as he put his hands in the pockets of his jacket. "Finally found it."

"Have you..." she gasped. She could feel the corners of her eyes start to water, and she had to blink rapidly to stop the tears. "Have you been looking for this exact spot... for thirteen years?" she asked in absolute disbelief.

He chuckled. "Well, when you put it that way it sounds *super* cheesy," he admitted somewhat sheepishly.

"No," she shook her head, taking a step closer to him, then another. "It's not cheesy at all," she assured him, her voice trembling with emotion.

They'd been together for so long that she was used to his sweet, romantic gestures— as much as one could get *used* to them, at least. Honestly, she was still touched and flattered every time he did anything special for her; and even when he didn't— even when he was just himself, no plans, no special occasions— even then, she thanked her lucky stars that she had him by her side. He was an incredible person, and she grew more convinced of that every day.

But this... this went *beyond*. How had he kept this front-of-mind for so long? How had *she* never thought to look for this place? And for him to manage to find it *just* in time... she couldn't believe it...

She walked up to him as if pulled closer by the sheer intensity of his gaze. Once she was directly in front of him, she ran her hand up over his chest, the cotton of his shirt soft against her palm, all the way up until she could cup his cheek. His dark eyes bore into hers, his hands coming to rest at her waist, drawing her even closer to him almost on instinct.

"This is amazing," she whispered, their faces so close that she could feel his breath tickle her cheeks. She lifted herself up on her tiptoes so she could kiss his lips just lightly. "*You're* amazing."

"So are you," he replied in a similar tone. "I just wanted..." He sighed.

"Sometimes I think back to that week, and everything that we've been through after that, and I just..." He shook his head. "I just don't know where I would be if we hadn't met that night."

"I know where I would be," she reminded him quietly. Immediately felt him raise a hand to caress her back and run his fingers through her hair, which she always found comforting. "That's why I'm thankful every day that you found me," she added, leaning forward to rest her forehead against his. "I love you so much."

"I love you more than anything," he responded, his eyes closing momentarily before he leaned in to kiss her, more fully this time than she had a minute earlier.

She sighed contentedly into his mouth, her arms wrapping around his neck in a well-practiced gesture that allowed her to push herself closer to him. Eleven never felt more at home than in his embrace, and even so many years later, kissing him still made her feel like she was flying. That's how she knew, she mused as she got lost in the feeling of his lips caressing hers.

That's how she knew they were forever.

He pulled back for a second to catch a breath, but she tugged at the collar of his polo to pull him back in, unwilling to part that easily. Soon they'd have to go back and deal with the preparations for the day, and while she was looking forward to the experience, a part of her kind of wished she could experience the whole thing with him by her side. Since she couldn't, she'd enjoy a few more stolen minutes where she could get them.

And enjoy them she did... until they were caught.

"Aren't you two a little too old to get busted makin' out in the middle of the forest?"

The two of them sprung apart quickly, turning to look at the source of the voice, who turned out to be Officer Callahan, dressed in his uniform as he would be on any other day while he was on patrol. Then again, El had known the man for over a decade and she wasn't sure she'd ever seen him wear anything *but* his uniform. Callahan was

a very simple person that way.

As he stood a few feet away from them, a second figure walked up behind him, smirking a little bit when he caught sight of the two of them in an awkward, obviously interrupted half-embrace. "Come on, Cal. Lighten up for once," Steve said as he pushed his sunglasses up to rest on the top of his head. "The chief's little girl is getting married today!"

As Callahan sighed in resignation, Steve walked up to them and threw an arm around El's shoulders, effectively forcing her to fully let go of Mike in the process. She rolled her eyes. "We haven't even been gone for half an hour. Was it really necessary for Dad to send out a search party?" she asked, shaking her head at Steve as if disappointed.

"He didn't," the older man replied with a shrug. "Honestly, it's your mother you have to worry about. You know how anxious she gets." Despite it being so early he seemed ready for the day's festivities, already good to go with his crisp dress shirt, fancy shoes, and a suit jacket that made him look like a "respectable fellow"—something she was sure Dustin would give him a good ribbing for later in the day.

"Now, come on," he added, giving her an affectionate squeeze, "you'll see each other again soon enough. I'm sure you'll survive being apart for a few hours while you get ready. In the meantime, Cal's gotta get you back home before everyone starts freaking out even more." He nudged her toward Callahan, but El took a second to turn toward Mike, who had been standing there somewhat awkwardly, hands in his pockets once again.

She smiled sweetly at him. "I'll see you at the wedding," she promised him, the love in her chest making her buoyant once again at the reminder that they were getting married that day. She couldn't believe the day was finally here.

He smiled back at her, her own excitement and devotion reflected back at her in his expression. "I can't wait," he replied, and she felt the urge to go back and kiss him again, but she knew she'd have plenty of time for that later. They could only play hooky for so long.

As she started to walk back to the cruiser with Callahan, she heard Steve address her fiancé. "All right, that's enough of that. You can stare longingly at her when she's walking down the aisle." Mike didn't say anything and El couldn't see his reaction because her back was to him, but she figured he had made some kind of rude gesture because Steve's response was dry. "Cute. Is that how you greet your mother, too?" El had to swallow a giggle.

"Speaking of," Steve added, "you're gonna have to come up with an excuse ASAP. You're driving us back to your place, and if Mrs. W figures out you snuck out at seven a.m. to make out with your bride-to-be, she's gonna have a stroke..."

His voice faded as the distance between the two pairs stretched, but Eleven still caught a glimpse of the two of them as they walked up to the curb while she was getting into the cruiser. She waved at Mike through the window, and he returned the gesture before opening the door of his car.

With a contented sigh and her heart still aflutter, she leaned back against the backrest, watching the trees go by as Callahan pulled back onto the road. A morning talk show on the radio provided animated background noise as they made their way back to her parents' house, but she was barely paying attention to it; she was lost in thought, basking in the knowledge that in just a few short hours, she'd be marrying the love of her life.

"Good morning to all of Hawkins! It is bright and early on Saturday, November the 9th, 1996, and it looks like we're in for a beautiful, pitch-perfect fall day..."

El smiled. Yes, she had a feeling today was going to be pretty perfect.

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Notes: *Artfully dodges writing about the actual wedding because she has no idea what Mike and Eleven's wedding would actually entail* xD I wanted them to get married on November 7th, which

was the day they met, but the Gregorian calendar was just not cooperating with me. Meh, I guess it's not that big of a deal. (Now watch it bug me incessantly for the rest of my life.)

(Also, Steve is in regular clothes here because I'm too chickens**t about canon to jump with both feet into the "deputy Steve" pool. My main instinct is always to keep things suuuuuper vague when it comes to him, lol.)

A little heads up: Barring any unforeseen circumstances, my next story is *not* going to be part of the Quiet Moments series, because it'll be AU. If you'd still like to get a notification when I upload it, please make sure you're subscribed to/following my profile rather than just the series, or stay tuned to my Tumblr at girls-are-weird. Wouldn't want anyone to miss it! It's gonna be a fun one. ;)